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Mrs. Kadiato Kamara:
An Expert Dyer in Sierra Leone[1]

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This paper gives a brief account of indigo dyeing in Sierra Leone. Two particular interests account for the organization of the paper: first, to indicate the social and economic conditions underlying the dynamic stylistic changes presently occurring in *gara* dyeing in Sierra Leone; second, to treat technique and style as seen in the work of one of the country's best known dyers, Mrs. Kadiato Kamara, in order to show the interaction of the above factors in context.

Sierra Leone lies midway along West Africa's Western Guinea Coast. Climatically, the country is divided into two zones, tropical forest in the south and a somewhat drier grassland environment in the north. Although it is a small country of some 27,000 sq. miles, Sierra Leone has a population of 2½ million people divided into 13 major tribal groupings. Many of the tribes belong to the great group of Mande-speaking peoples, a language family as diverse and

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important in West African history as are the Romance languages in Europe.

Both tie-dyeing and *batik* have a very old history in West Africa. In Sierra Leone, as elsewhere on the Western Guinea Coast, these types of dyeing are called *gara* dyeing, referring to the *gara* leaves which come from indigo plants, and which are the principal ingredients of the dye. "*Gara*" is a term of southern Mandinka origin and is used widely in Sierra Leone.[1] The Mandinkas are one of the principal Mande-speaking peoples and they and other closely related peoples are pre-eminent *gara* dyers, practicing the work widely throughout the Western Guinea Coast region. But, women of all ethnic groups in Sierra Leone practice *gara* dyeing, and it is likely that the technique of dyeing itself has a very ancient history in the area. Early European chroniclers make reference to dyeing (e.g., Vivian, 1896), and there is an example of *gara* cloth collected from the Western Guinea Coast in the latter part of the nineteenth century in the collections of the Smithsonian Institution.[2]

Undoubtedly, the practice of indigo dyeing in West Africa must be older than the past few centuries during which occasional historical references to it can be found. From the wide distribution of indigo dyeing in West Africa, as in other tropical areas of the world, it may be inferred that the dyeing technique is indeed quite old. In fact, the indigoferous plants consist of extremely varied species and occur throughout tropical areas around the world. Likewise, indigo dyeing, in one form or another, is also found throughout the tropical areas of the world. It seems likely that vat dyeing (relying on the fermentation of the indigo leaves and other substances) as practiced in Sierra Leone and elsewhere in West Africa, must depend on a settled existence, and may therefore have been one of the neolithic developments associated with agriculture and the settled pattern of life it allowed.

[1] Many of the terms used in this chapter, e.g., *siti*, *taka*, *kọlingie*, are of similar origin, and likewise are used generally in the *lingua franca* of Sierra Leone, which is Krio. Krio is the primary language of the residents of Freetown, developed originally by the peoples freed from slavery and settled there. The vocabulary of Krio is as diverse as were the ethnic groups that formed it. Many English words occur in the language, and "*cloud*" (used here as a descriptive term for one type of *gara* design) is such an example.

[2] A number of the references cited in the text offer general discussions of early mention of African textiles and dyeing. See especially: Barbour and Simmonds, 1971, *passim;* Boser-Sarivaxévanis, 1969, p. 153 and *passim;* Kent, 1971, pp. 1-3; Plumer, 1971, *passim;* Sieber, 1972, pp. 196-201 and *passim.*

Further, although detailed field studies of dyeing techniques in West Africa are still relatively scarce (Barbour and Simmonds, 1971, is one of the best to date; representative bibliographies may be found in Boser-Sarivaxévanis, 1969; Kent, 1971; Plumer, 1971; and Sieber, 1972), they do indicate that techniques may vary considerably among such centers as Nigeria, Mali, and Sierra Leone. While the general similarity of some styles suggests diffusion of aspects of this art, the basic differences on the technical level may suggest independent invention in the different centers.

It is obvious that the problem of the origin and history of indigo dyeing in West Africa cannot be dealt with by the use of historical sources alone. Archaeological work may uncover evidence of dye pits and pots, but the interpretation of such remains is often uncertain. Comparative linguistic and glottochronological studies of dyeing terminology in different language groups should be most useful in providing an idea of possible time depth, since it is a reasonable assumption that the words denoting special dyeing techniques would not have existed without the techniques. Finally, it is to be hoped that future ethnographic work will provide a fuller range of detailed reports which may be used in archaeological interpretation and linguistic study, and which will give a better understanding of one of Africa's richest cultural achievements.

Although indigo dyeing has given way in many areas of West Africa to cheap, imported "Holland cloth," Sierra Leone has seen a veritable explosion in this dyeing since World War II. The dyeing is now done mostly on imported cloth of varied types (ranging from cheap poplin, to cotton damask, to cotton satin), and in recent years there have been important innovations based on the new use of kola nut dye and commercial dyes. The dry season, October to April, is the period of greatest activity since the weather facilitates the work of airing and drying the cloth and exposing it to the sun. In addition, because the dry season is the time for both harvests and festivals, people have more money to spend, and they like to get new clothes for the festivals. Each dry season ushers in changes in style which spread rapidly throughout the whole country. Such intense stylistic variation seems not always to have been the case; according to Dr. M. C. F. Easmon (1967, personal communication), founder of the Sierra Leone Museum, formerly *gara* was seen mainly only in the long, dark robes of Moslems and in the cotton yarn used in native weaving. The basic designs seem not to have received very much elaboration and production was not as great as at present.

Due probably to general economic conditions and the influx of various Mandinka peoples in the post-war period, *gara* cloth became increasingly popular. Following the Pan-African Exhibition of African Art in Dakar in 1963, kola nut and commercial dyes began to be used, and the Government Crafts Centre in Freetown sponsored and encouraged these innovations. Thus *gara* dyeing may be seen as a national art in Sierra Leone both in its production and use (see below, p. 19), notwithstanding tribal and even personal variation in technique and terminology. The styles and terminology given in this paper have general use among all groups and function as an integrative baseline in both visual and verbal communication.

Social and Economic Organization of Gara Dyeing

Gara dyeing is regarded as a secret craft that a girl generally learns from her mother. However, personalities vary, and a woman may decide to teach other kinswomen the secrets, or even to teach a friend for a fee. One fee was described as including: one cutlass, one mat, one bolt of cloth, one fowl, seven Leones (ca. $8.50), and a large dish of cooked red rice (rice with palm oil sauce). Such a fee is considerable, in terms of local economics, but learning *gara* is well worth the cost, for the status of *gara* women has always been regarded as high: Little (1967, p. 39) notes that in the old days it was said that "the mark of a free woman was that her hands were always black with dye." While *gara* dyers no longer advertise their profession by going about with black hands, they are still well regarded for they do not have to leave their homes to practice their profession as, for example, market women do. Only in one town, Makeni, do women act as *gara* sellers in the market. Further, while *gara* dyeing is one of the few economically productive occupations a non-literate woman can follow besides farm work, it is not only non-literate women who engage in it. Literate women, some with considerable post-secondary education, also engage in dyeing. In Freetown, with its population of varied economic means, some of these women have achieved what might be called a *coutourière* role, catering to the wealthy by creating specially designed cloths and clothes for their customers.

When one woman teaches another *gara*, she is supposed to pray for the success of her student. Indeed, one well-known dyer said that when people have trouble with their dyeing, they come to her, give her a small present, and ask her to pray for them. Likewise, when a woman starts a new *gara* pot, she performs a small ritual and asks God for help with the work. Also reported, at least for

former times, are stricter observances, including celibacy during the work, but, at least at present, this is discounted by other practitioners. Here, as in other aspects of *gara*, variation is to be expected, especially inasmuch as it is a secret craft.

Traditionally, *gara* dyeing was women's work, but nowadays Mandinka men are also very active in it. A Mandinka woman explained that, formerly, the men kept the cattle and the women dyed cloth. Both the man and the woman worked, and so they prospered. Now that they have moved farther south into more forested areas and into towns, the men can no longer keep cattle, and so they work at *gara* dyeing, too. Since both sexes still work hard, they still prosper. Mandinka men are experts at sewing and tieing the patterns into the cloth and have come to be specialists at it. To be a true *gara* dyer a woman must know how to do these things, but, in fact, the women of other tribes often send cloth to these men to be tied and sewn, paying for it by the piece.

Types of Gara Compounds

There are presently in Sierra Leone three levels of organization of the production of *gara* cloth. The first level is the smallest operation (fig. 1). It involves one *gara* dyer, assisted at times by one or two kinswomen, and perhaps some of the children of the household. Even such a small operation requires a fair outlay of funds on such items as the various basins, pots, and drums which are needed, the dyestuffs themselves, and on cloth, wax, stamps, mortars, extra kindling for the fire and the like. While some of these things serve other uses in the household, together they amount to more than a poor household or even one of ordinary means would have at hand. Thus a *gara* dyer is likely to begin as a person of reasonable means. She may be the wife of a "big" man, a man of wealth, who does not require her help with farm work. Thus she is therefore free to engage in this occupation, bringing more wealth and prestige to the family, but principally to herself and her children.

The small-scale operation often tends to be sporadic. The dyer may set only one or two dye pots a season and produce not more than 40 to 60 *lappas*. A *lappa* is a length of cloth of standard size, big enough to be wrapped around the body as a skirt. This dyer sells locally, or sometimes a male kinsman may take the *lappas* into a large town and try to sell them there for her. Some small-scale *gara* dyers, who have gained repute, have managed to acquire better contacts for distribution, mostly in Freetown, the capital, and this allows them to maintain a fairly steady production. For the most

FIG. 1. Small-sized operation. Mama Kaday is rinsing the candle wax out of a *lappa* by dipping it into a couldron of boiling water. Other such rinsed *lappas* are hanging on the clothesline in the background. Much of the equipment needed by a dyer is shown: note the two 50-gal. steel drums used for the *gara* dye, one at the left rear and one behind the *lappas* hanging on the clothes line (field photograph: SL99C-21).

part, however, managing a wider distribution remains a tricky and difficult problem for the small-scale dyer.

The second level of organization of the production of *gara* cloth is a middle-sized operation (fig. 2) which includes all the members in the household of an extended family, consisting of some six to ten actively involved adults. The level of production is high, and the *lappas* are sold both locally and in the markets of larger towns.

Whereas the first two levels of organization appear among various ethnic groups in Sierra Leone, the third level of organization seems characteristically Mandinka. This level of organization which is much more commercialized, comprises an operation based in a large compound (fig. 3) housing a number of related families, as well as individuals hired as helpers. These helpers are usually young

FIG. 2. Middle-sized operation. A section of a fairly large extended family compound is shown. Several women are dipping *lappas*. The *lappas* are draped over poles which conveniently extend across the dye pots, so that the excess dye may drip right back into the pots. The pots in the foreground are old-fashioned pottery ones rarely seen nowadays; those in the background are cement imitations of the former. Note that the *lappas* being processed are stamped or tied into a variety of designs (field photograph: SL7C-22).

Mandinka men arriving in town from the country who may rise in the ranks of the compound and, eventually, establish compounds of their own. The number of people involved is considerably more than at the second level. These people share the open space and water supply of the compound either in a generally co-operative manner, or if facilities are limited, on a sequential day-to-day basis.

In centers that have large *gara* markets, such as Freetown and Koindu, these compounds produce for two types of sellers. First, they produce for the stalls located in the markets. Stalls must be rented from the shopkeepers in front of whose shops they stand, or from the market authority. A daily vending tax must also be paid. Several men from a compound may have stalls. The compounds also produce for younger men, who cannot afford stalls, and who are called *wọka-wọka* boys. They travel a given area of the country

FIG. 3. Large-sized operation. A section of a very large Mandinka compound is shown. Many dozens of *lappas* tied into various styles have been treated with kola dye and are drying in the sun. The man is opening the material to the air, which will help oxidation and set the dye better (field photograph: SL87C-5).

more or less on a monthly schedule, carrying a large number of *lappas,* and selling them in the towns and villages they pass through (fig. 4). They may also act as wholesalers in "lending" *lappas* to shopkeepers who repay the *wọka-wọka* men, after they have sold the *lappas* themselves.

The level of production of these large compounds is impressive. If need be, 200 or 300 *lappas* can be produced within two days. Production of batches of 100 or more at a time is normal (fig. 3). Once or twice a year, a man from such a compound may export a large number of such *lappas* to one of the West African tourist centers such as Dakar or Abidjan.

It is easy to see, then, how *gara* styles are disseminated. West Africans seem never to have been stay-at-homes, and the *gara* sellers themselves disseminate the styles not only throughout Sierra Leone itself, but also throughout the Western Guinea Coast area.

FIG. 4. *Wọka-wọka* Man, selling *lappas* in the market area of a provincial town. The *candle*-stamped design on a loose *cloud* pattern of a kola and *gara lappa* is produced by the methods shown in Figures 8 and 10 (field photograph: SL9C-8).

Likewise, they return with new ideas. New styles are also popularized by government officials and their wives, who wear them at official functions and on their trips up-country. *Gara* cloth is really a very important element of Sierra Leone's national culture and it seems a symbol of pride and unity — particularly when worn by government officials. It may be remembered that "Holland cloth" was used this way in Ghana when Nkrumah introduced the wearing of tribal robes at official functions.

From the above description, differences in economic scale of production and distribution may also be seen. The small-scale *gara* dyer may buy only one or two bolts of cloth at a time. When she has sold

the *lappas* made with this cloth, she pays up her account with the shopkeeper. An active small-scale dyer, however, may purchase much more cloth, and have an account running to the equivalent of several hundred dollars. Members of large-scale *gara* compounds operate with considerably larger amounts of money. In neither case, however, is the actual level of profit as high as one might imagine. Profit can vary from one-quarter of the selling price of a *lappa* down to a very miniscule fraction of it. When it is remembered that neither labor, stall rental, vending tax nor transport is included in cost computation, it is possible to see that real profit is very low indeed. Nonetheless, in terms of the general economy *gara* is still one of the more rewarding occupational endeavours.[1]

Large-scale *gara* compounds have an advantage over the small-scale dyer in that they can buy in bulk. They can also more easily afford commerical dyes, one can of which may cost the same as a bag of *gara* leaves which would last a small-scale dyer at least half a season. These factors, plus their more frequent use of cheaper cloth, give the compounds a competitive advantage over the small-scale dyer. Thus, the small-scale dyer continues to use *gara* leaves, with only occasional investment in commercial dye. Yet, even though the quality of her work is generally believed to be better than that of the wares of the *wọka-wọka* men of the large compounds, she finds it hard to meet the competition posed by their lower prices and novel color combinations. Many traditional *gara* dyers have, therefore, given up the practice of dyeing. There are now the beginnings of co-operative organizations among small-scale *gara* dyers which should ease their difficulties in making it possible for them to buy in bulk. Should they succeed,

[1] It should be emphasized that the selling price of a *lappa* may fluctuate greatly, from Le. 1.00 ($1.20) to Le. 14.00, according to factors operating both in production and selling operations. Such factors include the quality of goods, regularity and quantity of custom, season, locale, bargaining, and so forth. Keeping in mind this caution, the following may be taken as an acceptable cost-profit sales ratio: A *gara* woman will be happy if she can sell a good *briyon lappa* for Le. 3.00. The price of a bolt of good *briyon* yielding 12 or 13 *lappas* is Le. 24.00, or ca. Le. 2.00 per *lappa*. The average price of a quarter-pound tin of B.A.S.F. commercial dye, which is sufficient to dye about the same number of *lappas*, is Le. 3.00, or 25 cents per *lappa*. These two costs constitute Le. 2.25, or three-quarters of the selling price. From the remaining 75 cents gross profit must come allowances for standing overhead; replenishment of supplies, such as candle wax and candle stamps (the latter ranging in price from 20 cents to Le. 2.00); transport and/or seller's commission if the *lappas* are not sold locally; and labor. The costs given here represent those current in 1971. Since then costs have risen in Sierra Leone as they have elsewhere.

it is likely that the principal effect will be to widen the availability of commercial dyes, rather than to reinforce traditional methods.

Other authors have noted the limited potentiality that some African craft industries have for expansion in their present social settings (Lloyd, 1953, p. 42; Bray, 1969, pp. 192-193). As may be seen from the above discussion, the large Mandinka compounds are quite expansionist in nature; the Mandinka seem to have successfully translated the ideal of tribal brotherhood into larger economic opportunity through more economical and efficient production in *gara* dyeing. At the other end of the scale, the co-operatives offer similar alternatives for the small-scale dyer. Thus the co-operative in Bo has not only undertaken bulk buying but has also established a central work facility at the Catholic church.

Traditional Techniques and Styles

There are two basic means of imparting resist patterns to cloth by dyeing the whole cloth. One is by reserving the cloth at certain points with thread or cord; in Sierra Leone, tieing, sewing, and parcelling are employed; the other is by applying a viscous substance to the surface of the cloth, usually either wax or paste. In Sierra Leone wax is now more commonly used than is paste. Whatever the method employed, the cloth receives its pattern by retaining its original color where the cord, wax, or paste has resisted the dye's penetration.

When the cloth has had the resist pattern applied, it is then dyed. The principal ingredient of the dye bath is the *gara* leaves themselves. Various other substances may also be added, as for example, roots, bark, berries, ash, and other leaves. Although Little refers to the boiling of the dye (1967, p. 290), this does not appear to be the general practice now. *Gara* is fermented, the average period being a week to 10 days, although the process can be hurried up if necessary. Likewise, as the dye becomes exhausted, it can be freshened with additions of fermented leaves and roots.

It has been said that *gara* dyeing is much like cooking, and each woman has her own recipe. Moreover, she will vary the recipe according to the effect she wants. In general, darker blues can be obtained from more frequent dippings when the dye is fresh. Lighter hues result from fewer dippings or the use of semi-exhausted dyes. Since the early part of the century, two commercial ingredients have been in general use as well: caustic soda, which hastens the fermentation more effectively than the potash substance form-

erly used; and a simple, cheap commercial black dye, which reinforces the deepness of color. As noted above (p.14), the use of kola nuts has become popular in recent years. Kola nuts by themselves yield a rich reddish-brown color. Some people add caustic soda to the kola nuts, which results in a duller brown color.

In order to show the intensity of work involved in *gara* dyeing and how it fits into the pattern of daily life, a record of three days' production by Mrs. Kamara is presented here. During this time she dyed some 30 *lappas*, representing numerous variations on most of the basic *gara* styles. A small-scale *gara* woman has to produce in this manner to be able to present for sale enough variety to attract different buyers. A large-scale compound, on the other hand, can devote the same period of time to producing many dozens of *lappas* of the same style on a production-line basis, which will then be divided among the different sellers.

Mrs. Kadiato Kamara is a very well-known dyer in Sierra Leone. She has also won prizes for her work shown in British Commonwealth exhibitions. Fortunately, she has been able to arrange reliable sales outlets in Freetown, which makes it possible for her to produce at a greater rate than the ordinary small-scale dyer. Mrs. Kamara is a woman of some status, is fairly well off, and is a very kindly and gentle person. Among her friends and neighbors she is known as Mama Kaday.

The granddaughter of a Temne Paramount Chief, Mama Kaday had a traditional upbringing, learning *gara* from her mother rather than formal schooling. She has learned to speak Krio but not English. She is now in her late thirties and lives in Freetown where her husband is a successful businessman. At the time the work described here was done, Mama Kaday's household included her widowed mother and grandmother, a sister with two small children, a visiting sister-in-law, an old man-servant, and her seven surviving children. All of her children except the two youngest boys were at school. As is the case with many other *gara* women, it is the proceeds from her *gara* selling which provide the children's school fees.

On Tuesday morning, after a breakfast of hardboiled eggs, bread, and tea, Mama Kaday, her old servant, and a friend went to the outskirts of town to dig some roots for the preparation of a small new pot of *gara* dye. The *gara* dye she would be using for the next few days had been started by her mother the previous week. When the roots were brought back to the house, the dirt was washed from them, and they were laid in the sun to dry while other ingredients

for the mixture were gathered. All were then put in a large enamel basin with water. Caustic soda was added which immediately turned the water red. The basin was then left beside the compound wall for two days to ferment. These preparations had taken the best part of the morning.

After lunch, she went round to a local shopkeeper, paid up her account, and bought a bolt of good cotton satin. Returning home, she was joined by the other women of the house, and the rest of the afternoon and evening were spent in cutting and sewing the cloth to proper *lappa* size. A regular *lappa* of a good size is approximately 48 by 72 in. Since most cloth bolts are only 36 in. wide, part of the bolt must be cut in strips of ca. 12 in. and the strips added to widen each 72-in. length. Since the *lappas* are ordinarily dyed either folded in half or back to back (a matter of economy so as not to waste dye in heavy absorption on the reverse side) the seam is on the reverse side and does now show. After seaming the *lappas* on the sewing machine, Mama Kaday started sewing and folding some of them into patterns. When Michael, one of her older sons, arrived from school, he, too, was recruited to sew *siti.* Although he is not fond of the job, he does it very well.

Siti is produced by a looped or "cat" stitch, and may be sewn into a *lappa* in a number of different patterns and sizes (fig. 5). Most often it is simply stitched horizontally all over the *lappa.* But it may also be alternated in horizontal or diagonal bands with other designs or with plain areas. In the case of banding, the lines dividing the bands are simply sewn tight with a straight stitch. Then the *siti* pattern is sewn into the alternate bands. When *siti* is to be alternated with other bands in the cloth, the non-*siti* bands are covered with plastic (bolts of cloth are sold wrapped in plastic), and tied tightly. When the bands of *siti* have been dyed as desired, they, in turn, are covered with plastic and tied, and the other bands are uncovered and dyed.

On Wednesday morning Mama Kaday began the day-long process of dipping the *lappas* that had been prepared the day before. She used about 10 or more dips for those *lappas* she wanted to be a very deep, dark blue, only one to three times for a lighter shade. For lighter shades immersion in the dye lasts no more than 5 min., while for darker shades the immersion may last about 20 min. After "pulling" the *lappas* from the *gara,* she set them on a wire rack over a galvanized metal tub to drain and air. It is important to spread the material as openly as possible so that the air can reach it; this

FIG. 5. Mama Kaday's son Michael sewing *siti* (field photograph: SL97C2).

causes the indigo to oxidize and bond with the cloth. It is also felt that it is good to expose it to the sun as much as possible.

With the *lappas* in the *gara* for their first dip, Mama Kaday began preparing wax. Since candles are melted to obtain the wax, the resist technique using wax is called "*candle.*" A tin basin was filled to one-third full with water, and the wax added to raise the level another third. The level of the wax must be several inches below the lip of the vessel for safety's sake when being heated. Water is used for the same reason, since the wax by itself would easily ignite. The tin basin was set over a fire to heat. The wax must be brought to quite a high temperature in order to permeate the cloth sufficiently; if too cool, the wax simply lies on top of the cloth and the dye seeps under it.

Mama Kaday then covered a low bench with several layers of burlap, topping them with a piece of cloth. She deliberated over various wooden stamps, choosing her newest ones, some of which had a current strong popularity. (Stamps are made by carpenters, or sometimes by wood carvers.) When the wax was hot enough, the basin was brought to the bench, and she began to stamp the *lappas,*

FIG. 6. Kandeh Konteh, a Mandinka man tieing *taka* (field photograph: SL87C-12).

carefully moving the stamped part of the material away from her as she proceeded.

The *candle* stamping went along with interruptions either to take the *lappas* out of the *gara* to air for approximately 10 to 20 min. intervals, or to put them back into the dye once they had aired.

At one point a neighbor, Mr. Bangura, an old carpenter and builder, wandered in as Mama Kaday was wondering whether to leave borders on the *lappas,* or to carry the stamp design all the way to the edge of the cloth. He insisted that she leave borders to show the woven pattern of the cotton damask material which is called *briyon* or *brillon.* This he thought much better because people could easily see that this was an expensive material, not just plain poplin or

shirting. Characteristically, Mama Kaday listened quietly and sympathetically to what he had to say. Apparently, however, she wasn't completely convinced, since throughout the day she varied all-over stamping with borders. While borders are generally considered nice, another consideration is that when the material is sewn into clothing patterns, the borders may not always fit well.

As work on the *lappas* went along Mama Kaday continued thinking about which *lappas* she wanted in which styles. Deciding to do five of the satin *lappas* in the *taka* style, she took them across the street to a Mandinka compound for the men to do, so as to save time for herself.

In doing *taka,* two *lappas* are dampened, placed back-to-back, and folded into approximately 1-in. pleats. Cord is tied tightly about the pleats from one end, or border, to the other. The resulting pattern is one of longitudinal stripes (fig. 6).

Returning from the Mandinka compound, she again took the *lappas* from the *gara* to air and then set her daughter, Isatu, and another young girl to pounding kola. From a large box containing about 10 gal. of kola nuts, about 1 gal. was measured out and put, bit by bit, in the wooden mortar for the girls to pound. The resulting pulp was added to water in a large basin. During the day, as the *lappas* were dipped in this mixture, the pulp was strained out and pounded again. New nuts were also pounded and all added again to the liquid. At the end of the day. the basins were set aside for further use.

Once the girls had started pounding the kola, Mama Kaday swept an area of ground, spread out two satin *lappas,* and started doing what she calls "*broom style candle*" on it (this style is also called "*scattered candles*"). In the technique for making this style, the bristles of the short, hand-held broom are dipped in the hot wax, and the wax is then dripped, or "*scattered,*" over the cloth. In doing this, Mama Kaday did not proceed with wild abandon. She carefully and thoughtfully dripped the wax, leaving open areas for the second application. Also, she often checked the back of the cloth to make sure the wax was penetrating it. Each of these *lappas* was dipped in the kola mixture three or four times, dried, "*candled*" again, and dipped for a short time in the *gara.* The overlay combination of the two dyes produced a rich blackish color (fig. 7).

Four of the *lappas* that had been candle-stamped were then wet, drained, placed on a tilted piece of pan roofing, and each gathered into a loose "*cloud*" pattern (see below). Over them Mama Kaday

FIG. 7. Mama Kaday doing the second application of wax on a *broom-style candle lappa.* The *lappa* has already been sprayed with candle wax and dyed in kola. The second sprays of wax, which appear dark in the photograph, will resist some of the golden kola color. Thus the resulting *lappa* will show variegated shades of kola and *gara*, as well as sprays of white, resisted in the first application of wax (field photograph: SL99C11).

generously sprinkled kola pulp, leaving them to drain until the next day. The excess liquid drained down the corrugations in the pan sheet into a basin so as not to be wasted (fig. 8).

In fact, nothing is wasted. At one point, Sarah, Mama Kaday's sister-in-law, to whom whe was teaching *gara*, began gathering up bits of string and plastic wrapping and throwing them in a dustbin. Laughing at this prodigality, Mama Kaday stopped her, pointing out that all these things could be reused many times. Likewise, candle wax is reused. When the wax is boiled off the dyed *lappa*,

FIG. 8. Mama Kaday dripping kola dye over loosely bunched *cloud lappas* that have already been *candle* stamped. The excess dye runs down the corrugations of the metal sheet and is collected in a basin for re-use (field photograph: SL98C-14).

it is scooped off the surface of the hot water and reserved; the cloth covering the bench on which the stamping is done is scraped and the bits added to the continuing store of wax.

After lunch, Mama Kaday sat in the shade of the compound wall and did some *lappas* in the *cloud* style. In this technique, the *lappa* is carefully gathered with the fingers into little cloud-like puffs. As the *lappa* is bunched together bit by bit, it is kept pushed against the inside of the thigh. Since the tendency of the material is to come out of shape once the fingers have transferred to another area, this is a very difficult style to make. But the resulting pattern, said to look like clouds in the sky on a moonlit night, is considered

very beautiful indeed. This is a pattern that only the women produce.

Another pattern which also appears to be produced only by women is *kọlingie.* Although Mama Kaday did not do any *kọlingie* patterns during this particular period of work, the method may be described briefly. A paste of rice or cassava flour is spread on a *lappa,* and, while still wet, a pattern is fixed on the surface by scraping a comb in semi-circles. Sometimes linear patterns are effected. When the paste has dried, the *lappa* is carefully and briefly dipped in the *gara* dye. After the dye has dried and set, the paste is washed out.

Meanwhile, Saidu, Mama Kaday's youngest son, had been whimpering and fretting. He had been very ill, and toddled about after her demanding attention vociferously so that, between dipping the *lappas* and other work, she gave him a good ration of holding and hugging. At other times, his sister or the older women would try to amuse him. Now, Mama Kaday took him in her lap as

FIG. 9. Mama Kaday holding her small son Saidu while she *candle*-stamps (field photograph: SL99C-5).

she sat at the bench to stamp more *candle,* and he quickly fell asleep in the crook of her arm. She continued holding him and stamping the cloth (fig. 9). Finishing this task, she handed Saidu to her mother who put him in the house to continue his nap.

Mama Kaday now took up a long length of satin, and began sewing it into a *cloud* pattern. This is a rather unusual way of producing *cloud,* and the resulting pattern is very sharply defined (fig. 10). As soon as she finished it, she put it in the *gara* drum.

Nearby was a sack of *gara* leaves. She took a large bucketful of them, rinsed them, using a basket as a strainer, and put them in fresh water to soak over night. After this preliminary washing, they would be combined with the root mixture and left to ferment for another week.

Next she took the kola-dyed, *broom-style lappas* down from the clothes-line where they had been drying, and laid them out for the second application of *candle.* This time, too, she dripped the wax carefully, keeping in mind the final patterning of colors desired. When they were done, she put them aside to set, pulled the *lappas* from the *gara* drum to air, and went to bathe and rest before dinner.

On Thursday morning Mama Kaday started work by rinsing and draining the *candle*-stamped *lappas* which had been dyed in a loose *cloud* pattern in kola dye. She then gathered each into a loose *cloud* pattern again, and dipped them in the *gara* just a few times for only two or three minutes. In between times, she strained the *gara* leaves, which had been soaking overnight, and put them in fresh water.

She then loosened the *cloud gara* and washed it in two cold baths. When just untied, the *gara* is a bright emerald green in the areas that were sewn tightly. The oxidation process can be observed as, on exposure to air, the cloth becomes blue. The water in which the *gara*-dyed *lappas* were washed was saved for use in the dye drum. Next, the *lappas* dyed in both kola and *gara* were washed, but this water was thrown out, since it was muddy in color. The washed *lappas* were then hung on the line or laid on rocks to dry.

A very large bucket of water had been put over the fire to boil, and into this Mama Kaday dipped the *candled lappas,* each at the end of a long pole, to remove the wax. This is one of the most tiring tasks involved in *gara* work. The water-ladden *lappas* on the end of the pole are very heavy to lift. The hot sun beat down, the heat and smoke of the fire blew in her face as the breeze continually changed direction (fig. 1).

FIG. 10. Sewn *cloud lappa. Gara* on white satin, by Mrs. Kadiato Kamara. Note that some of the threads used to sew the pattern have not yet been removed from the *lappa.*

As she finished boiling the *lappas,* her kinswomen took them from her to wash them in cold water, and then hung them up to dry. Once dry, the *lappas* could be beaten on a wooden log with wooden clubs to give them sheen, and the whole process would be finished. The *lappas* would now be *gara* cloths.

Earlier in the morning Mama Kaday had again strained the *gara* leaves and had left them to sit in a basket. She now brought them to the root mixture which had been sitting for two days. With a simple ritual of crossing her hands, she delivered bunches of the leaves to the root mixture, ending with an unspoken prayer asking for God's help in the work.

While her kinswomen spent the afternoon beating the rest of the *lappas,* Mama Kada went again to the local shop to buy some more cloth. Later, she went to an outlying section of town to visit a cousin, and the two went out to the farm to check *gara* bushes that grew there in among the other plants.

That evening after dinner, Mama Kaday went to the mosque for prayers. She is a deeply religious woman, remarking with joy and wonder that God should have put the leaf in the bush for the people to use.

Aesthetics of Gara

What is a good *gara* cloth? The answers given here certainly do not represent rigid rules which everyone uses in judging *gara,* for in Sierra Leone, as elsewhere, aesthetic preferences may be expected to vary. As one *gara* woman said, while looking over a batch of *lappas* that hadn't turned out to her satisfaction, "Oh no. I'm not going to dye them again. You'd be surprised what people will buy. They'll all be sold eventually."

The first consideration is the dye itself. Young *gara* leaves are known to give the best color, rich and deep. It is deep and powerful color that is generally preferred, even with regard to commercial dyes. Pastel colors are not very popular, perhaps because they may often be taken as connoting a poor dyeing technique. Nonetheless, there is a light blue color, called *fẹnte,* that is liked. This color is almost always found in connection with the *kọlingie* style, but sometimes with other simple designs or simply plain.

Next, the fabric itself is a consideration. This is, of course, partly an economic consideration, since nicer materials cost more. But they also give sharper patterns and wear better and more comfortably. In addition, the *briyon* or cotton damask, as mentioned earlier, already has attractive patterns woven into the material and cotton satin comes with a readymade sheen, very much liked. In the case of other cotton materials, the final step of beating them provides a sheen.

The final consideration is the character of the designs given the cloth. While any particular design may fade in and out of popularity over time, there are general criteria which apply overall. Tied, sewn, and parcelled designs must have sharp patterns. If the design has a vague or fuzzy appearance, this indicates that it was not ably produced: the tieing or sewing may not have been tight enough, the folding done in a slipshod manner. Again, for the *candle*-stamp designs, regularity and continuity of pattern are looked for. Spots of

wax caused by dripping are thought bad, though they often do occur. In such a case, one may try to hide the spots when sewing the material into clothing. Too many cracks in a stamped pattern are not appreciated either.

Novelty itself, of course, is an important criterion, and it is this characteristic which has kept *gara* dyeing in Sierra Leone a lively and dynamic art form. It is also the eagle eye of the buyer, combined with strong tradition among the dyers themselves, that has kept standards of quality high, as may be seen in the work of Mrs. Kadiato Kamara.[1]

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[1] The original version of this paper was completed in March, 1973, and was used as the basis for the chapter, "Pattern-Dyed Textiles," in the catalogue, *Contemporary African Arts*, published by the Field Museum of Natural History in 1974.

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